

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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A RED SISTER.

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CHAPTER IV.

ON the morning after the birthday festivities Lady Joan sat at her writing-table in her boudoir with a very sore heart.

For one thing, her husband, instead of riding over to Wrexford, the centre of the colliery district, according to his wont immediately after breakfast, had remained closeted with his father for nearly two hours. That two hours' talk with the old man Lady Joan knew, from experience, meant mischief; in other words, the concoction and development of some scheme of an essentially plebeian nature.

For another, Herrick had not presented himself at the breakfast-table; and, instead, had left a message with the butler that he had gone over to Summerhill to breakfast. That meant that he had no intention of paying the slightest regard to his mother's wishes in his choice of a wife.

Hitherto, Herrick had shown himself singularly unsusceptible to feminine attractions, and, on this slender foundation, Lady Joan had built a castle sky-high. Her brother, the present Earl of Southmoor, had but one child—a daughter—who shortly would leave her school, at Brussels, and make her *début* in society. To this young lady, in default of heirs male, Southmoor, with its dilapidated mansion and acres run to waste, would descend. Now, what in life could be more suitable than that Herrick should marry this cousin of his, and, with the wealth that must even-

tually be his, restore and beautify the old place, and settle down there among his mother's people?

And this cherished plan of hers, which had been growing and gathering strength as the years went by and Herrick remained fancy free, was to be all in a moment swept away by a girl who had come—Heaven only knew whence—to officiate in the family of a wealthy iron-master in the neighbourhood as nursery governess!

The room in which Lady Joan was seated was perhaps the only one in the Castle that showed no touch of the Gaskell hand in its furnishing and arrangement. It was redolent of another atmosphere. She had selected it on account of a view it commanded, beyond the newly-planted trees in the park, of a little glade—a tangle of bracken and bramble backed by a copse of hazel and wild plum—which vividly recalled to her the wild Devon scenery surrounding Southmoor. She had crowded into the room abundant reminiscences of her old home. Over the carved oak mantelpiece hung the portrait of her dear old grandfather, the seventh Earl of Southmoor. Side by side, on the opposite wall, hung the likenesses of Lady Joan's father and mother, both of whom had died in her early childhood. Around the room hung other family portraits, copied from those in the great gallery at Southmoor, by Lady Joan's own hand.

It would, however, have been rash to conclude from these evidences of her skill that Lady Joan was a devotee of any one branch of art. That davenport, pushed close to the grand piano, held the score of an unfinished opera. The writing-table at which she sat contained the beginnings, or endings, or middles of at least a dozen essays on subjects which, from time to

time, had engaged her attention. The bookcases, in various corners of the room, proclaimed what those subjects were. They covered a wide range: political economy, social science, modern religious thought, were all abundantly represented in those well-filled shelves.

A casual observer entering the room and glancing round, might have expatiated upon the high intellectual gifts and varied artistic tastes of its occupier. A deeper thinker, possibly, would have surveyed it from another point of view, and found in it evidences of a mind restless and ill-at-ease; of a life which had, somehow, missed its mark.

It was further characteristic of Lady Joan that, although the writing-table at which she sat contained, in an inner drawer, many prized relics of the dear Devon days—so many, in fact, that they seemed to make an atmosphere all their own in the room, and she never sat down to that table without being conscious in a subtle sort of way of what it held—yet among them all was there not a single memento of Vaughan Elliot and his early love-making.

"You must make your choice, Joan, and make it finally, with no whining after-regrets," her grandfather, the old Earl, had said to her when John Gaskell had made his offer of marriage. "If you want to marry Elliot, marry him and be a country parson's wife. You know what that means—there are many typical examples in the neighbourhood. If you marry John Gaskell, you will have all the luxuries in life you desire, and, when the old man is dead, your influence with your husband no doubt will be paramount. You can make him shake off his plebeian associations, and live where and how you please. There is no third choice for you. I am too poor to give you a season in town, and as you know, when I die, everything here must go to your brother."

So Lady Joan had made her choice, and had been as resolute as her grandfather had wished her to be in excluding all "whining after-regrets" from the scheme of her life.

After that passionate final interview with Vaughan Elliot, in which he had seen fit to conduct himself for all the world like a man with a heart in his body, she had said to herself: "This man must go utterly out of my life now—as utterly as I, no doubt, shall go out of his." For thirty years she had held to her resolve, and though John

Gaskell, no doubt, might have had abundant reason to complain of his wife's coldness and want of sympathy, never for an instant had she given him cause for jealous distrust.

Yet, although Vaughan Elliot and his passionate love had ceased even in memory to be more to her than last year's blighted crop of summer roses, Fate, throwing her shuttle hither and thither, had cast the threads of his life athwart the warp of hers. Here, to her very doors, the man had come, silently as any Nemesis "shod in wool;" and by-and-by, so Fate had decreed, he was to knock and ask for admission.

CHAPTER V.

LADY JOAN found her correspondence that morning uphill work. While her pen "presented compliments" to Lady This or Mrs. That, and accepted or refused this or that invitation to dinner or "at home," her thoughts rang painful changes on Herrick and his ill-advised love-making. It was something of a relief when her maid came, with many humble apologies, to ask if "my lady" would be pleased to see Lucy Harwood, the would-be new maid, who waited below.

The engagement of her maid was always a matter of first importance with Lady Joan, and one that she delegated to no one else. Her standard, as regarded the maid's acquirements, was a high one, and involved not only skilled knowledge of her duties, but exceptional refinement of manner and appearance.

When Lucy Harwood was shown into the room, Lady Joan's eye, as it lifted, saw that her standard in these latter respects was reached. Before, however, she had talked with the girl five minutes, other things, beside her pleasing appearance and gentle voice, had impressed her—the hurried, nervous manner, the deep sadness of tone, and the wandering, far-away look in the eyes of the young woman.

The nervousness of manner Lady Joan thought natural enough. No doubt it was an ordeal for a girl in her station to be suddenly shown into the presence of a great lady; the sadness also, she thought, might be accounted for by the black dress the girl wore; but that far-away, wandering look in the eye, puzzled her. Only once before in her life did she remember to have seen such a look, and that was in the eyes of a girl charged before her husband, in his official capacity as a local magistrate,

with attempting suicide. She closely questioned Lucy as to her bringing up and present surroundings.

The girl's replies were simple and straightforward enough. Her father, she said, had lived as butler at a rectory within a few miles of Southmoor—Elliot was the name of the Rector.

Lady Joan slightly smiled.

"I knew him quite well," she said, easily, as if the name conjured up no bitter reminiscences. "And your mother is dead?" she added, glancing at the girl's deep black.

The girl's lip quivered; she did not reply.

Lady Joan, desirous to avoid a display of emotion, resumed her questioning at another point.

"You were born and educated at Southmoor, I suppose?" she asked.

"I was born at Southmoor, my lady," answered Lucy, "but was sent away when I was very young to live with an aunt in London, and only occasionally went home. When I was about fifteen, my father broke up his home in Southmoor and took a farm, the one my brother has now, near Wrexford. When my aunt died I came home to Wrexford; then my father died—"

"Yes, I know," interrupted Lady Joan, for the story had but a scanty interest for her when it drifted into the details of the girl's private affairs.

Then she concluded arrangements. Lucy might come for a week on trial, be initiated into her duties by the present maid, and if she gave entire satisfaction, Lady Joan would engage her permanently. If she liked, now that she was at the Castle, she might remain, and one of the grooms would drive over to the farm and fetch what she might require for a week's stay.

This offer Lucy gratefully accepted. As she left the room John Gaskell's firm, brisk footsteps were heard in approach.

"I'm late," he said, as he came in. "Joan, did you wonder what had become of me? I fear I can't get back from Wrexford now much before dinner."

As a rule, John or Herrick, or sometimes both, were in the habit of rising from the breakfast-table and setting off straight for Wrexford, where every matter, small or great, which concerned the working of the colliery received their individual attention. Millionaires they might be—these Gaskells of three generations—but that,

to their way of thinking, was no reason why they should neglect the mill which ground out the gold, so long as their names continued to be connected with it.

Lady Joan looked up from the writing-table, where she was rearranging her correspondence.

"Not till dinner!" she repeated, a little absently, meanwhile trying to get her thoughts together, and decide whether she should at once consult her husband respecting Herrick's foolish love-making, or whether she should defer so doing till his return in the evening, when business matters would be off his mind, and he would be able to give her a more undivided attention.

"I'm afraid not," her husband continued. "My father and I had so many things to talk about, that I hardly knew where to break off. By the way, Joan, he's not looking at all as I should like him to look. I'm afraid yesterday was a little too much for him."

He paused, waiting for a reply from his wife.

Although John Gaskell and his wife were both past middle life, they still made a handsome couple. Tall as she was, he stood at least half a head taller; and though his features might lack the aristocratic curves and lines which hers owned—notably those of the upper lip and nostril—there was yet in his face a frankness of expression, a straightforward look from his blue eyes right at the person he chanced to address, which abundantly compensated for the deficiency.

His manner of addressing his wife was perhaps a trifle more ceremonious than is that of most men after a married life of close upon thirty years. John Gaskell, however, before he had been wedded a year, had discovered upon what footing he and his wife must live, if "peace were to dwell within their walls," and, like the sensible north-countryman that he was, had looked the fact in the face, and had shaped his course accordingly.

"I think it was a little too much for every one," said Lady Joan, coldly, for the keeping of this ninetieth birthday with such effusion had seemed to her a ridiculous business throughout.

"Well, it was too much for him, at any rate," interrupted John, knowing that he and his wife looked at this matter from different points of view, "and I shall be glad if you'll go in once or twice while I'm away and see how he is getting on."

Where's Herrick? I've not seen him this morning."

"Ah, I wanted to speak to you about Herrick," said Lady Joan, feeling how impossible it was to neglect this opportunity for mentioning the subject which had caused her such disquietude.

But her husband interrupted her again, feeling that a lengthy discussion threatened now.

"When I come back, Joan, will do for that. After dinner I will tell you exactly what I think about Herrick and his love-making. Just at this moment I've a good many things in my head—small matters, perhaps—matters of detail, most of them, but till they're got rid of, my mind is not free to attend to other things. Now, good-bye till dinner-time." He turned towards the door as he finished speaking, then paused a moment, with his hand on the handle. "Oh, by the way, Joan, I may as well give you a hint as to the matter my father and I were discussing this morning; we've rather a big scheme on hand just now. My father has always insisted that the coal-seam dips under there"—here he pointed to the little glade crowned by the hazel copse—"and he wants to buy up that alic of land, and a little bit that skirts the heath, and sink a shaft. It'll bring the colliery business rather close to our doors; but, of course, the inconvenience to us will be slight compared with the money it will bring into the district; it'll be the making of Longridge."

Lady Joan drew a long breath. So, then, the little hazel copse, which recalled the wild Devon scenery, was to be uprooted, a coal-shaft sunk, and the whole nasty, grimy colliery business was to be brought to their very doors! And this at the suggestion of the feeble old man who couldn't walk across the room without help! Was the greed of these Gaskells for money-making never to be satisfied?

She drew her lips tightly together, but never a word escaped them.

John Gaskell's mind, however, was so full of other things that he did not see the look which clouded her face. His eyes were fixed, like hers, on the glade and hazel copse, and in fancy he saw the wood cleared away, the shaft sunk, truck lines laid down; in a word, the whole country around for miles astir and at work.

He noted her silence, however, and said to himself:

"As usual, she sees things from another point of view, and is too honest—or too

proud—to affect a sympathy she does not feel."

Aloud he said:

"Good-bye again, Joan. Don't forget to look after my father and attend to all his wishes while I'm away."

This was how John Gaskell left his home on that bright August morning. Stalwart, cheery, his heart full of kindly thought for his wife and aged father; his brain teeming with visions of the increased prosperity which would flow into the district so soon as his "big scheme" began to work.

CHAPTER VI.

"At last I get you to myself," said Herrick, drawing a long breath. "Now tell me, Lois, what on earth made you run away, as you did yesterday, without saying a word to me?"

Lois, hanging her head like a naughty child expecting a good scolding, answered confusedly:

"I was frightened, and so I ran away—I didn't think about what I was doing—I ran away just because I was frightened."

It was no wonder that Herrick should say "At last!" Although he had arrived at Summerhill before breakfast, in that most irregular household, had come to an end, yet it was not until after luncheon that he could get five minutes' quiet talk with Lois.

Lois White not only officiated as nursery-governess to Mrs. Leyton's seven small children, but acted generally as that lazy little woman's factotum and representative on every possible occasion. And this was no sinecure in a household where, though wealth abounded, order was at a discount. Summerhill was now full of guests, and Lois was everywhere in request. Herrick, naturally enough, chafed under a condition of things he intended to bring to an end as speedily as possible; but, for the time being, he was obliged to submit to seeing Lois at the beck and call of every one except himself.

Mrs. Leyton, so far as it was in her to look with favour on anything disconnected with herself and her own immediate pleasures, was disposed to view with a friendly eye Herrick's love-making to her pretty governess. She had bitterly resented Lady Joan's slight in not calling at Summerhill, when Josiah Leyton, buying an old house that chanced to be in the market and lavishing his gold upon it, made a

bid for county society. To put no bar to Herrick's intercourse with Lois seemed to her an easy way of paying off this debt. "For if," as she confided to her maid, with whom she was on very familiar terms, "anything should come of it, that proud woman will be taken down a peg."

Herrick's passion for Lois had been of remarkably rapid growth. The first time he had seen her in church, his eye, wandering from his mother's statuesque and inscrutable features, was struck by the girl's mobile and childlike beauty.

He had made vigorous efforts to induce Lady Joan to show some sort of civility to the new arrivals; but, failing lamentably, had taken matters into his own hands, and had got himself invited to certain social gatherings, at which he knew they would be present. Being a young man of strong will and very decided opinions, he, naturally enough, preferred the society of women in whom these characteristics were kept well in abeyance. Also, naturally enough, since he owned to close upon six feet of stature, and in face was dark and pallid, he had a strong predilection for the society of the petite and the blonde. Lois White fulfilled all his requirements in these respects, and his love-making to the little governess had been ardent and persistent accordingly. Neighbours, after a time, had begun to talk; and their talk had even reached Lady Joan's ears. She, however, had at first thought it wiser to disregard these rumours, and had not even thought it necessary to mention them to her husband, saying to herself, that this must be a flirtation—nothing more—on Herrick's part, that, if no stress were laid upon it, must die a natural death.

Later on, however, her opinion had had to be modified, for Herrick, in her presence, had made one or two remarks which could not be altogether ignored; such as: "I think it is nearly time I settled down as a married man;" or, "Father, you were younger than I am, when you married, weren't you?"

Lady Joan's fears, however, had not risen to danger point until the morning of the birthday festivities, when Herrick, as he rose from the breakfast-table, had said:

"Mother, this afternoon, I am going to introduce to you a young lady with whom I hope you'll fall in love on the spot. I shan't say any more till you've seen her."

Lois had, with difficulty, been induced to allow Herrick to drive her over to the

Castle. "I want them to see your beautiful face, my darling, and to hear your sweet voice; and then, one and all, they'll say, 'Herrick, you're a lucky fellow, get married at once,'" he had had to say over and over again, before she had yielded.

On arriving at the Castle, he had taken her straight to the pavilion, beneath which sat old Mr. Gaskell, and had introduced her to him as his "darling little wife that was to be." Whereupon, the old man had taken both Lois's hands in his, and had bidden "God bless her," in his kindest tone. Then Herrick had intended introducing her to his mother; but, before he could find Lady Joan, he had come upon his father in the thickest of the crowd, endeavouring to adjudicate upon the rival claims of two competitors in a "consolation race."

"Here, Herrick, come and help as umpire," he had cried, catching sight of his son. "You're wanted here, there, everywhere."

Upon this, Herrick had gone through a hurried introduction of Lois to his father, from whom, amid so many distractions, little more than a nod and a smile could be expected. Then, promising to return speedily, he had, very much against his will, taken Lois into the adjoining meadow, where Lady Joan was distributing sundry gifts to the old people, and, introducing her with special emphasis, had left her in his mother's charge, while he returned to the village athletes. Lady Joan had at once developed so arctic a manner that poor little Lois could almost have fancied herself in latitude eighty degrees north, in spite of the blazing sun which poured down on them.

"I was frightened, and I ran away," was all the account she could give to Herrick of what followed, as side by side they strolled under the big branching oaks and beeches with which the park at Summerhill abounded.

The explanation was not to Herrick's mind entirely satisfactory. For a minute there fell a silence between the two. Then he said:

"Lois, will you tell me, word for word, what my mother said that scared you so?"

"Said! Oh, she said nothing at all!" answered Lois, readily enough.

"Nothing! And yet you were scared!"

"Oh, yes; her silence was so dreadful, I felt it—felt in a moment that she didn't like me. Oh, and now I think of

it, she did say something. I made a remark about it being so fortunate that the day was fine for the sports, and she said: 'I beg your pardon.'

Herrick's grave look gave place to one of amusement.

"And that scared you!" he cried. Then he added, not knowing what a prophetic undertone rang in his light words: "Is that the way in which you mean to get through life, Lois, fleeing like a little bird to covert at the first alarm? It is lucky for you you'll have me to look after you, or I don't know what would happen."

How like a child in disgrace she looked as she walked on beside him in silence, her head drooping so low that her big sun-hat hid her face from him! She was dressed in a simple white frock tied with broad sash ribbons. In her hand—the one that Herrick left free—she carried a child's spade and a large bunch of wild flowers. These she had been laden with as she came out of the house by little four-year-old Daisy Leyton, with the injunction that "Loydie"—as she most disrespectfully styled her governess—would remember to make the Adonis garden under the big beech-tree as she had promised to do more than a week ago.

Right into the heart of a "regal red poppy" there fell a big, round tear.

Herrick's arm was round her in a moment, and her big sun-hat, pressed against his shoulder, suffered in shape accordingly.

"My darling, what is it?" he cried. "What have I said—what have I done? Tell me."

When Lois found her voice, her words came all in a rush:

"Oh, Herrick! I see it all now—I did not understand it at first when—when you spoke to me. But yesterday, as I stood beside your mother, I seemed to feel what she thought, and to see things with her eyes—and that was why I wanted you to come to-day—that I might tell you—"

But she was not allowed to finish her sentence, for Herrick's lips kissed her to silence, and the sun-hat suffered in shape again.

"I beg your pardon, Lois," he said, presently, as she straightened her hat, "but I knew you were going to talk nonsense, and took measures accordingly. My poor child! You are trembling from head to foot. Come and sit down under this beech, and if you don't mind,

we'll just quietly talk this matter out together."

Under the spreading shade of this beech there were one or two wicker seats. Lois declined the one which Herrick placed for her, and kneeling down on the turf, began to make Daisy's Adonis garden. It was an easy way of keeping her face turned from Herrick, for she was still bent on saying the words he had so summarily cut short, and it seemed to her easier to say them with her face thus hidden from him.

He flung himself on the ground beside her, handing her the flowers as she planted them.

A pretty scene it made—these lovers planting their Adonis garden—in the wide expanse of russet-green sward, broken only by the black blots of shadows cast by the oaks and beeches. The stillness around them was that of early autumn, when Nature—always a strict economist of her wondrous forces—bids bird-notes to cease, while she flings her glorious reds and yellows across creation.

"In spring I called upon you to open your ears," she seems to say; "now I say open your eyes, stand still, and admire!"

Herrick broke the stillness.

"You said just now, Lois," he began, gently, as he handed her a purple foxglove, "that, when you stood beside my mother, all in a moment you seemed to see things with her eyes, and to feel as she felt. Will you mind, now that you are beside me, seeing things with my eyes, and feeling as I feel? I assure you it will be much more satisfactory to me if you will."

Lois's face turned brightly towards him; she was half-smiling now, though her eyes still glistened with tears.

"Your mother is older than you——" she began.

"Naturally," interrupted Herrick.

"And, of course, knows better than you do what is likely to make your happiness," she said. But she said it in a wavering tone, as if she were quite willing to be convinced to the contrary.

"Pardon me, I can't admit that. My mother has no more conception of what would constitute my happiness, than she has of what would make the happiness of any one of the collier lads over at Wrex-ford. However, if you are going in for the wisdom which age brings with it, I'll tell you what my father said yesterday when I wished him good-night. 'Herrick,

he said, 'I like the look of that little girl you brought over to-day. You must let us see more of her.'

"Did he say that?" broke in Lois, impetuously.

"Ay. And he's five or six years older than my mother; so of course, in your eyes, he knows better than she. And there's the dear old grandfather, he's forty years older than my mother—think of that—and he said: 'Thank Heaven I've seen your wife before I go, Herrick. Now I know your happiness is secure——'" he broke off, exclaiming: "What, darling, tears again! Why, you're watering your flowers!"

In very truth the girl's tears were falling like a summer rain among the already drooping blossoms.

But still, like a child who won't forego repeating some speech which it has mastered with difficulty, Lois set herself to say the words which Herrick was so loth to hear.

"What I wanted to tell you, Herrick, was that—if—if, on thinking things over, you thought that—that you'd been hasty in—in asking me to marry you——"

Again she was not allowed to finish her sentence. She was planting a thick border of heather round her miniature garden. Herrick laid both his hands on hers, stopped her work, interrupted her speech.

"My darling," he said, and his voice now quivered a little, "I know exactly what you are wishing to say, and I beg of you beforehand not to say it. Remember, I'm not a feather-headed boy who tumbles into love one day and out of it the next. I knew perfectly well what I was doing when I asked you to marry me, and I say to you now what I said to you then, that if only you love me, not father, not mother, nothing in all creation, nothing in this world, or in any other, shall ever come between us."

For a moment after he finished speaking the great stillness around them once more made itself felt. Then suddenly, sharply, breaking in upon it, came the sound of a tolling bell.

It seemed to come inopportunistically. They started and looked at each other.

"Oh, I know," cried Lois, presently, "it's St. Elizabeth's bell. I met the new priest yesterday, and he told me he was going to start afternoon and other services, and I should hear the bell going at all sorts of hours. I had a long talk with

him. I fancy you would like him, he seems such a nice man."

"Does he?" answered Herrick, indifferently, not knowing what a factor in his life's history this priest was to be.

A BOAT-RACE SKETCH.

THE wonder is, where all the people come from who are scurrying down towards the river, with their dark or light-blue ribbons fluttering in the breeze. There are more of them than ever, one would say, although we are told that the boat-race is no longer the great function that it used to be in the days when columns of picturesque description occupied the front pages of the daily journals. And this is no Saturday affair either, when more or less of a holiday is the rule; but a solid, business-like Wednesday, when the world in general is supposed to be engrossed in its daily occupations.

Certainly, a considerable portion of the crowd is composed of those to whom life seems to be one long holiday; gangs of lads and young men, mostly of loose and patchy attire, who march along in little bands, whooping and yelling as they go. But these noisy youths mostly stream off along the tow-paths, where an improvised fair is going on, with cocoa-nut shies, shooting galleries, and all the latest spring novelties in the way of popular amusement.

Certainly there is less congestion, perhaps, at certain favourite spots than there used to be in the old days of Plancus and his merry men; but that is owing chiefly to the new Hammersmith Bridge, which is now open to the actual moment when the boats have started, although the police have all their work cut out to keep the dense throng continually passing along. The old bridge, it will be remembered, was considered so frail that it was closed for all traffic for three or four hours before and after the race; and, for people living on the Middlesex shore, it was the business of a whole day to go and see the boat-race with any comfort from the other side.

But we have crossed the new Hammersmith Bridge—more sturdy, but less graceful, than its predecessor—and now the pressure is relieved of elbows and iron-heeled boots, for the multitude keep to the river-side, where the tow-path is already dark with thick clusters of people. We

are for Barnes Bridge—the railway bridge that is—and so through Castelnau, that curiously-named region of villas, and then by a pleasant way across the green, where the pond is, and the ducks, and the old-fashioned houses that look out upon the scene.

There are great works going on at Barnes, of the main-drainage order, with great banks of soil and huge chasms covered with planks, all barring the way to carriage traffic, which is sent round the other way. In Barnes High Street we are in the thick of the crush again. All London, you might think—had you not seen a considerable portion of it going elsewhere—was marching solidly down to the river; or on drags, four-horsed omnibuses, costers' barrows, coal-carts, spring vans, and every other description of vehicle was being carried at a foot's pace in the same direction.

Along the river-front there is the same general crush—that pleasant river-front, with its comely, red-brick houses—and the same, as far as one can see, in either direction, while every opening reveals the sight of more people hurrying along to join the general throng. Further on there is a row of carriages drawn up, and vehicles of all kinds, brewers'-drays, coal-carts, drags, and shandrydans, all crowded with spectators, while lines of people, three or four deep, are drawn up on the very edge of the river-bank. Between the lines it is possible to squeeze along without much difficulty, while negro minstrels, acrobats, and street performers of all kinds contrive to secure a pitch here and there in the middle of the throng. An amiable-looking young man is distributing tracts among the preoccupied crowd. "Never you refuse a track, sonny," says a turfy-looking man to a young companion who has rejected the proffered leaflet with some disdain. "I've picked a winner out of a track before now."

It only requires a little patience to get near the front rank of a long array of spectators, and here is the river at last, looking brown and turbid enough, and rather lumpy by reason of the strong breeze, and pretty low among the mud-banks, the tide being low, and having made no sign as yet, the wind, which is blowing the contrary way, having much the best of it. The jolly young watermen, who are bucketing up the river to find places somewhere higher up, find the business a toil rather than a pleasure,

and the steam launches have the best of it, especially those craft from below bridge, with jolly skippers on board, and dock-masters and their wives and daughters, the craft that are accustomed to rough, windy reaches, and think nothing of them. There are tugs, too, that have hauled big ships along before now, and that now have got a barge or two at their tail; the barges, as smart as paint can make them, with chairs and tables on board, and all kinds of refreshment in the chief cabin. Now a smart little yacht steams quietly along, or a Conservancy steamer, which has an air of business about it, but which perhaps only means pleasure after all. Or the City banner is displayed, or a pennant with the magic word "Police"; for the guardians of the shore, and the Conservators of the river, alike are fond of a trip afloat on boat-race day.

Not that the traffic on the river is all one way; down come steamer after steamer laden with up-country people, which are looking for berths lower down. And there are steamers, too, which are run as so many advertising stations, and whose business it is to be in evidence constantly, up or down. By-and-by, when the flood-tide is fairly on the move, the flotilla of row-boats increases in volume. If any of the various crews happens to have a shade of blue upon the blades of the oars, immense is the ironic cheering and mocking laughter that greets its progress.

Where we stand is the centre of a crescent-like bend of the river—the headland far down the river being somewhere opposite Thorneycroft's torpedo works—with Chiswick meadows stretching green, and rather sloppy-looking, on the other side of the stream. On this side, the line of shore is black with people all along, and a considerable number have found their way to the green banks on the other side. The other way, Mortlake presents itself, with its houses and breweries, and the "Ship," conspicuous with its flags, its frontage darkened with human beings; and opposite is the barge that forms the winning-post, with a background of willows and osiers. The iron railway bridge, too, is a conspicuous feature close at hand, about the supports of which a number of nimble and adventurous people have perched themselves. Presently train after train draws upon the bridge, and discharges its load of passengers, till, when the last one has drawn off, the bridge itself is fairly crowded with spectators.

Already there is an artist on the top of one of the pillars, sketching in the surroundings of the scene; and elsewhere photographers have got their cameras in position. In fact, we are all here, except the rival crews, and although the cry is still "they come," yet, still they don't come.

Altogether, there is a fair amount of din to occupy the waiting crowd: cheers, and laughter, and loud hootings, as some belated craft—occupying the rôle of the stray dog on the racecourse—is pulled along erratically by an unpractised crew; and between whiles rise the hoarse songs of the minstrels, the twanging of the banjo, the patter of the public performer. Along the rails are drawn up two or three drags full of undergraduates, who, in faultless Bond Street attire, show the University colour in lovely "button-holes" of violets, and who manifest the inherent high spirits of youth by keeping up a hideous discord on their long coach-horns, while a bugle and a trombone make themselves heard at intervals. Next to the drags is a clump of coal-carts, filled with jolly coalmen, "Shillin' a hundred, coal," all in their Sunday best, and vying with practised lung with the horrid noises of their neighbours.

But, suddenly, all noises cease. There is perfect stillness for a moment; even the breeze has fallen light, and the ripple of the water is hardly heard. Then cheers and clamour sound faintly in the distance, and out of the haze and rippling gleam of the far distance comes an indistinct and moving mass, which presently resolves itself into two glittering tracks, where dripping oars flash swiftly to and fro, with a background of steamers and launches, seemingly piled one on the top of the other, as if two gleaming, silvery fish were pursued by an army of dolphins, tritons, sea monsters, with a whale or two thrown in.

But a general roar of wild excitement rises as it is seen that the race is a close one; and the boats shoot under the bridge, Oxford three parts of a length in front, but Cambridge not done with yet, but, with a desperate effort, drawing up foot by foot.

And so, with frantic cries of encouragement from every side, they pass out of sight, swallowed up in the crowd of following craft. Loud has been the uproar among the under-grads, shrieks, cries, personal adjurations to individual members of the straining crews. And now the crowd relaxes, without dispersing, and every one

awaits in breathless interest the hoisting of the flag which shall declare the issue of the race.

One does not see why the crowd, chiefly composed of Londoners, who have, few of them, ever had the remotest connection with the Universities, should feel such a vital interest in the result; but thus it is. And the interest is not confined to the crowd actually present. All London, with the greater part of England, and that considerable portion of the round world that still flies the old flag, are waiting anxiously for tidings of the event. And, as far as London is concerned, anxiety will be everywhere satisfied in half an hour's time, not so much by the evening papers and special editions—although these are smart enough about the business—but by means of a kind of personal magnetism: the news transmitted orally, or by signs among engine-drivers, omnibus conductors, cabmen, letter-carriers. So that, in many a quiet suburb far away, where the only signs of the contest are in the light and dark-blue flags that flutter in the back gardens, or the ribbons in the housemaid's cap, people will know "who has won" as soon almost as we do.

Meantime, veterans discuss their experiences of former races, though all agree that this contest of 1890 will prove "a record" for the even, ding-dong nature of the contest all through; for the beauty of the weather—some one recalls the race of 1872, which was rowed in a snowstorm—and for the comfort and good-humour of the crowd, combined with its immense extent, the whole four miles of foreshore being thickly planted with human beings.

And what a contrast between the scene presented in 1845, when the race was first rowed over its present course! The first race between the two Universities, by the way, was rowed at Henley in 1829, and then not another till 1836, when the old Westminster to Putney course was used, and the affair became intermittently an annual. The boats used then were strong, sea-going craft, oak-built and copper-fastened. Outrigged boats were first brought out in 1846, but were of much heavier construction than now; for it was not till 1857 that the keel-less, cigar-shaped racing eight, as we now know it, came into existence. And then with sliding seats, adopted in 1873, we have the modern racing craft complete; and it is difficult to see how she can be made slimmer, swifter, or more cranky.

Now the general impression among the crowd—especially among the female portion of it—is that Cambridge ought to win, in order to make the two Universities exactly even in their wins and losses; an equitable settlement which Fate interferes with on the present occasion, for the dark-blue flag is presently seen to be the uppermost, and there is frantic rejoicing among the under-grads of that persuasion. They shout; they roar, they cheer themselves hoarse; they dance with joy, flourish umbrellas like tomahawks, and generally seem to have gone stark staring mad with joy and exultation. Oxford's horn is elevated now, anyhow, and it blows a fearful blast, while Cambridge on the bugle can only sound a mournful "retreat."

There is still plenty to be seen on the river, which is nearly covered with floating craft. Advertising steamers buzz about, and the full tide creaming with crimson hues as the sun declines redly among the mists, bears to and fro the argosies loaded with those who take their pleasure upon the waters from far and near, whether from the regions of Limehouse, or Albert Dock, or Tilbury, or the furthest South-end, or from pleasant Richmond, or ancient Kingston, or from the thousand and one villas, hovels, or palaces that line old Thames's banks from here to Marlow, famous in the annals of bargees. All are homeward bound by this time, and the crowd on shore begins to give signs of disintegration. Those who are on the bridge are taken up in trains, and depart, like souls who belong to another sphere; everybody's carriage is stopping the way; coachmen are struggling to lead their horses through the crowd; people dart under horses' legs, and beneath waggons, and storm the spring-vans on either side, in their anxiety to get away. Here are country parsons among the rout, with their broad felt hats and rosy cheeks; old oars, promoted to shovel-hats and gaiters, beam through their spectacles upon the crowd, which they are happily out of. The nice old-fashioned houses turn out their temporary denizens. Here are houses where nice, old-fashioned, hospitable riverains used to live, who kept open house on boat-race day. But, alas! they are almost all gone now, and a commercial spirit reigns; windows and balconies are appraised at so much a head, and people put boards across their summer-houses and hen-coops, and reap a more or less bountiful harvest of half-crowns.

And as people spread themselves out a little, and find room to give play to their lungs, what a babel of voices and cries meets the ear! The newsboys fling themselves into the battle with their "Result of Lincolnshire Handicap!" and find their harvest among the crowd, where sporting proclivities are not unknown. Alphonse is there, too, in a wonderful check suit, "tout à fait Anglais," who has studied the manners of England, and is explaining them effusively to a less instructed companion. Germany is represented by its bakers, of whom a solid majority, taking London over, put in an appearance at the boat-race. And there is a Scandinavian element from the Commercial Docks; and we have China, and Japan, and the real African sable brother; all mixed up pell-mell with carriages and horses in a slowly-moving column, horse, foot, and artillery, that stretches out for miles and miles, till it adds its quota to the crowd and din of London streets.

MINERVA'S BOON.

THEY stood by their mother's chariot, the Argives young and fair,
With the laurel wreath, the athlete's prize, set on their clustering hair;
They stood by their mother's chariot, as proud and calm she came,
To pay her vows at Heré's shrine, the stately Spartan dame.

No oxen yoked to draw her! Must she fain at home abide?
Out laughed each stalwart hero, as he stood on either side;
And for forty measured furlongs of the winding mountain road,
Young Cleobis and Bito drew on their honoured load.

Loud shouted all the multitude, as in her tearful joy,
The mother from her chariot smiled on each bright glowing boy;
As on to Heré's altar in her matron pride she passed,
Mid waving flags, and chanted song, and ringing trumpet blast.

And kneeling at the shrine, ablaze with many a glittering gem,
"Look on my sons," the mother prayed, "great goddess, give to them
The boon, the best and brightest that in omniscient love,
To his mortals, at his daughter's word, comes from immortal Jove."

And, legend says, great Heré looked down with her large, clear eyes,
And listened to the mother's prayer, and took her sacrifice;
And when the solemn festival had passed in song away,
Asleep beside her altar steps the fresh-crowned athletes lay.

Asleep; while on each fair, proud face the moon-beams, stealing down,
Touched softly either young red mouth, touched soft each laurel crown;
While the mother knelt beside them, and checked her sobbing breath,
For Jove, in quiet sleep, had sent his choicest blessing—Death.

In the Temple raised in Delphos two honoured statues stand,
For the story of the granted boon flew through the startled land;
And Cleobis and Bito smile through the ages there,
From sorrow, sin, and failure saved by the mother's prayer.

IN THE FOLKS' WOOD.

A STORY IN TWO CHAPTERS. CHAPTER I.

IN the summer of 1876, Fate and a state of feeling which I can only describe paradoxically as one of apathetic restlessness, took me into the depths of the country for a few weeks.

"A long and listless boy," like Tennyson's hero, like him, too, I was "late left an orphan," though not by any means of "the squire."

My father, a scholar and recluse, had recently closed a blameless career by a death befitting the calm dignity of his life; leaving me, a shy and studious lad, a dreamer of dreams, alone in a world where dreams are at a discount, and for whose strife the rarefied atmosphere of our silent intercourse had ill fitted me.

My mother had died too early for me to distinguish between vague, infantine memories of her and my knowledge of what her smiling portrait—painted before her marriage—showed her to have been.

If my father had ever formed any plans for my entering a profession, I was ignorant of his intentions. He never spoke of them to me, at least; and I am inclined to think that he felt he could leave no better heritage to his only child than the old book-crammed house, with its traditions of learned leisure and scholarly retirement, which had so amply fulfilled his own ideal.

But under the shy reserve of the long-limbed, awkward lad—upon whom I look back now, across the years that have passed, with a half-pathetic wonder if he indeed were I—strange new forces were beginning to assert their right to live; and, after the first few weeks of bewildered newness succeeding the gentle old scholar's death, the mingled feelings I have spoken of inclined my awakening spirit towards change—change of some sort—and the drowsy air of the summer amongst the

closely-packed houses (for the father and son had lived their lonely life in the heart of the largest city in the world) grew stifling.

In this mood, it chanced that an advertisement, printed amongst others on the outside sheet of a scientific journal, caught my weary eye; and within half an hour my answer was written and posted.

The advertisement ran thus:

"Comfortable rooms, with board, in a country house, in the midst of the most beautiful scenery in——"

No; I will not tell the name of that loveliest of counties, or give even the slightest clue to help the ravages of tourists. Let that spot—where first I truly lived—remain sacred in one memory. Even to me it seems dreamlike now. There are moments when I doubt if I could find my way to it, whether it really exists at all, except in the remembrance of the dream I dreamed—and awoke from—there.

The advertisement went on to speak of moderate terms, of the station from which the house could be reached, and so on; and ended with a recommendation of the place as especially suitable for an artist or a gentleman reading for examination.

Now, I was, unfortunately, neither of these things; but, nevertheless, the idea of the "comfortable rooms" in that country house took my fancy amazingly, and I must own—since I was at heart, under my reserved and shy demeanour, a very fanciful and imaginative lad—that the name of the place itself was a strong element in the attraction. "For particulars, apply to Miss Denison, Folks' Field," had a ring of the "Midsummer Night's Dream" about it which was very taking; and, since I had lived all my life in Titania's Court, this same name proved one of the most powerful elements in my instant determination to become the summer occupant of the rooms at Folks' Field.

It was a lovely day, late in June, when, all preliminaries arranged, and with expectation—half apprehensive, half pleasureable—in my breast, I alighted at the station in the small town—whose name I do not intend to tell—and looked for the "trap" which Miss Denison's letter had informed me would be in readiness to convey me to Folks' Field, a distance of six or more miles.

There was only one carriage in waiting, so even my diffidence was equal to asking its driver if I were right in sup-

posing it to be intended for my—Mr. Stephen Erskine's—conveyance to Folks' Field; and, on an affirmative grunt, I mounted to his side, and we began a leisurely progress through what—having since travelled over half the world—I still think scenery as beautiful, of its kind, as eyes could desire.

The "trap" was of ancient build; the horse had seen better—and far younger—days; the man matched both, and had a gruffness all his own; but there was an occasional glint of something related to sympathy in his small blue eye, as it peered from his wrinkled, weather-beaten face, at what he doubtless thought my unhealthy pallor and fragility, that gave me courage to ask him a question or two about the country we passed through.

Presently we returned into a road—or rather a track, half turf, half earth—that wound through a wood that seemed to me the most beautiful sight I had ever seen. The massed trees; the intense blue of the June sky; the warm fragrance of the fir-scented air; even the bumps and jolts of the carriage as it lumbered along the rutty, grass-grown track; are as vivid in my memory to-day as they were then in actual fact.

A rusty gate came in sight; my driver dismounted heavily, opened it, and we jogged on through more trees; past a great sheet of water where the moor-hens perked their little heads as they swam hurriedly away; along a short avenue that seemed a mere clearing in the woods; until at last we stopped at the door of a low, irregularly-built house, with creeper-covered walls, and a look of neatness—not to say primness—about it, which was greatly at variance with the neglected air of the surrounding garden and out-houses.

An old woman, who was as neat as the house, and who, I learned later, was the wife of my gruff driver, opened the door and greeted me with an old-fashioned curtsy, while behind her appeared a lady whom I assumed—correctly—to be Miss Denison herself.

My hostess was a largely-made woman, of somewhat gaunt figure, who looked about fifty, and who must have been handsome in her youth. Her hair, under its neat cap, was very grey, and there was a worn and anxious expression in her grey eyes, which somewhat belied the great cheerfulness of her cordial welcome to me.

Probably I did not see all this at the

first glance; after events stamped it on my memory.

"I hope we shall be able to make you comfortable, Mr. Erskine," she said; "you must promise to tell me if you want anything, and I will do my best to please you. It is the first time we have taken a boarder, so you will know that if anything is not quite to your liking, it is my inexperience, not my will, that is at fault."

I stammered some sort of profession of faith in her powers; and, to turn the conversation, expressed my delight at the beauty of the place, the woods, and the pond—lake—I did not know which to call it.

"The Folks' Mere, it is called," she said; "and the wood, the Folks' Wood. The names have come down from the days when they were thought to be the haunts of the fairies—the Good Folks."

"It is a lovely name," I said, fervently. "I hope I may catch a sight of the fairies that haunt them still."

"Ah!" she said, and sighed, with the anxious look plain in her eyes.

I felt rebuffed, for it was something motherly and sympathetic in her that had drawn me on.

"I will show you your room," she went on; "and then, perhaps, you would like to take a stroll about the place before supper. My father likes to keep to his old habits, so I hope you will not mind humouring him by dining early."

Of course I hastened to assure her that my dinner hour was a matter of supreme indifference to me; and after making acquaintance with my bed-chamber—a cheerful, bright room, with spotless drapery and windows looking across the garden into the depths of the wood—I made my way out of the house and along the avenue by which we had driven.

Presently I turned in amongst the trees, wandering here and there, intoxicated with the beauty and the fragrance, and regardless of the direction I took.

Suddenly, a little ahead of me, I caught sight of a figure lightly winding its way amongst the trunks—a slight, airy figure, in white garments, that seemed to trip over the ground without sound of foot-fall.

"The fairy of the woods!" I whispered to my heart, "Titania herself!"

But the airy figure stopped short in a green ring, where felled trees had made a clearing, and seated itself on a fallen

trunk; and then I perceived that it was a human being, a girl; but of so ethereal and delicate a form that a less fanciful beholder than I might well have been excused for taking her for the guardian sylph of the woods.

She raised her head and gazed intently at the branches above her, evidently quite unaware of my presence; and then I saw plainly the soft, pale fairness of her oval face under its crown of dusky hair, and the azure of her dilated eyes. As I looked—not knowing whether to make my presence known to her or not—a strange, sweet smile crept over her face, and she began to speak softly, her outstretched hands waving gently.

I turned, intending to creep away unseen; but my foot trod a rotten bough, and at its crackling she started, caught sight of me, and in a moment had risen, and was flitting once more through the trees in what I imagined to be the direction of the house.

My pulses throbbed. Could she be an inmate of Folks' Field? Miss Denison had mentioned no one but her father.

The wonder gave me a thrill. Life grew interesting all at once, and my purposed sojourn amongst the woods an adventure in Fairyland.

I followed the flying nymph at a respectful distance; but I saw her no more.

At eight o'clock—the hour which, as I had been informed, was appointed for supper—I descended to the pleasant room, where a substantial meal was laid with a neatness and spotless cleanliness that spoke of Miss Denison's personal supervision, to find my hostess and her father awaiting me.

"Father," said Miss Denison, "this is Mr. Erskine;" and I received a frigid bow from one of the handsomest, as well as the sternest-looking old men, I have ever met.

Mr. Denison of Folks' Field was six feet two in height, and bore his seventy odd years upon shoulders that put my slight, stooping ones to shame; while he carried his haughty head, with its mass of silver hair, with the pride of an acknowledged monarch of the earth. His garments—like his garden and out-buildings—told of age and rigid economy; but he wore them as though they had been royal robes.

I had been on the point of putting out my hand as Miss Denison introduced me; but at the sight of that freezing bow I withdrew it, with shame and confusion in

my breast; it was as if I had offered to shake hands on being presented at Court.

Mr. Denison led the way to the table, where I sat at his daughter's right hand. The table was laid for four, and, before I had begun to eat, I had become aware that both my companions glanced at the unoccupied place opposite me with varied expressions.

Miss Denison's faded face showed a hot flush on each cheek-bone, and I saw her anxious eye wander from the empty chair to her father more than once as she talked to me. Mr. Denison had cast one stern look at that side of the table as he took his seat; but he ate his meal in unbroken silence.

The door opened softly, and a girl slipped into the room, and timidly approached the table.

It was my woodland nymph in her white gown, looking lovelier, if possible, now with a faint flush on her pale cheek and her blue eyes cast down.

Mr. Denison looked up angrily.

"How late you are, Sylvia, dear!" exclaimed Miss Denison, hurriedly, but with evident relief from anxiety in her voice. "You forgot we had a visitor. This is Mr. Erskine. Mr. Erskine, my niece, Miss Sylvia Denison."

There was a second's pause before the last word, which came out with a hint of defiance, that I somehow connected with a movement as of anger Mr. Denison had made as his daughter spoke.

Miss Sylvia acknowledged my bow—the very best I could manage—with a timid little inclination of her pretty head, and a heightened colour, and, slipping into her chair, began to eat her supper in a dainty, bird-like fashion.

She did not look at me again; and since she sat in perfect silence, I did not venture to make any mention of our previous meeting in the woods. Miss Denison and I kept up a desultory conversation, until her father, having finished his meal, rose, and, with a "Good evening, Mr. Erskine," as awful as his first greeting of me, left the room.

"My father spends the evening in his own sitting-room," explained my hostess. "You will get used to our ways in time."

I assured her earnestly that she must not consider me in such matters. In fact, I felt infinitely relieved that the terrible old man should prefer spending his evenings alone, and so leave me to revel in the company of the beautiful Sylvia, her aunt's

presence being, to my youthful diffidence, quite other than a drawback.

"Sylvia, darling, why did you stay out so late?" Miss Denison was saying, with an anxiety in her voice that would not brook waiting for my absence to express itself. "You know your grandfather dislikes unpunctuality so much."

"A warning for me," I thought, determining not unnecessarily to rouse my host's wrath.

"Oh, Aunt Rachel, it was so lovely! I forgot. And then——" she looked shyly across at me.

"I came upon Miss Denison in the woods, before supper," I explained; "I am afraid I startled her, for she ran away at the sight of me."

"Silly child!" laughed her aunt; but the anxious look was strong in her eyes. "You won't be afraid of Mr. Erskine again?"

The girl looked at me and smiled.

"No," she said, like a child.

"I'm not a very terrible person," I said, and then wished I had not, for Sylvia's eyes went to the door by which her grandfather had left the room, as if my words suggested comparisons.

We went into the drawing-room then—a long, low-pitched room, with faded furniture, and a scent of pot-pourri, where a wood-fire burned in the grate—pleasant and friendly, in spite of June weather and wide-open windows; and then Sylvia grew bolder and talked a little, with the awakening confidence of a reassured child.

Ah! how lovely she looked; the fire-light caressing her soft cheek and dancing in her eyes; the slender hands clasping and unclasping each other, as she imparted to me some of the secrets of the woods she seemed to know by heart.

Miss Denison sat and knitted and listened, putting in a word now and again, but leaving the burden of the talk on us two young people.

"I thought you were the fairy of the woods yourself, to-night, Miss Sylvia," I said once, jestingly.

She fixed her eyes on me with a strangely intent expression.

"Didn't you see——?" she began.

"Sylvia, dear, come and hold this skein for me," put in Miss Denison; "and, Mr. Erskine, may I trouble you to put another log on the fire? You will find the basket by the side of the fireplace."

At ten o'clock Sylvia rose and kissed her aunt affectionately. Then she held

out her slim hand to me. "Good night," she said, in her soft, even voice; "will show you the woods, to-morrow."

"My niece is not very strong," Miss Denison was saying, when my eyes came back from following the girl's light figure to the door, as she passed out. "That is why I—why her grandfather and I—don't like her to be wandering in the woods so late."

Delighted—if abashed at finding myself discussing this beauteous nymph with her aunt and apparent guardian, for I concluded she must be an orphan—I was emboldened to murmur, "She is so lovely;" and stopped short, affrighted at my own boldness.

Miss Denison looked at me gravely for a moment, with eyes that seemed to be searching my very soul, and made me think she must be offended.

"Yes," she said at last, with a sigh, "she is lovely. Mr. Erskine, I don't often make mistakes about character, and I think you are both kind-hearted and trustworthy——"

She paused, and I blushed hotly as I stammered out that I hoped so.

"Sylvia leads a dull and contracted life here," she continued. "It is not good for her—for any girl—to live the narrow life she lives. It will be such a great help to her if you will take a little trouble to divert her mind from—to amuse her; to talk to her a little about the outside world, the world away from this weary—this wood."

The anxious look was very strong on her face as she spoke.

"Trouble!" What could it be but pleasure and delight to amuse or interest this fairy maiden of the woods? What sweeter reward could diffident youth desire than to bring the smile to her eye, the laugh to her lips?

"It will be the greatest pleasure to me, Miss Denison, I assure you, if Miss Sylvia will allow me to be of the very slightest service or diversion to her in any way," I declared grandiloquently, but none the less sincerely; and Miss Denison bade me good-night with kindness that seemed almost like gratitude, and dismissed me to slumbers in my lavender-scented sheets that were haunted by visions of the woods and this white-robed Dryad.

When I woke next morning, my eyes opened on the unfamiliar room with a sense that I must still be dreaming, and I should presently awake to find myself in

my well-known chamber in London; and, even as I dressed, vague fears beset me lest the fairy of the evening before were at best but the heroine of an especially vivid dream, so that my heart gave a palpable leap when, on entering the breakfast-room, I saw her sitting demurely at the table, looking in the bright morning light no less lovely, though something less ethereal, than under last night's glamour.

Miss Denison greeted me with smiling cordiality, while her father's cold "Good morning," expressed as little of that virtue as words could manage.

But what mattered an old man's coldness to a young dreamer, before whose eyes the first blissful vision of young love was unfolding itself?

THE DOWNFALL OF THE ZEBRA.

THERE is only too much reason to fear that one of the most beautiful animals in the world is rapidly becoming extinct. Sportsmen and travellers concur in reporting that the zebra of South Africa is now more and more difficult to find, and is, like the aboriginal races of primitive lands, disappearing before the march of civilisation. And, unlike "the noble savage," the agile zebra has ever resolutely refused to be tamed. In spite of Pastor Robinson, and the amazing capabilities of the immaculate Swiss Family, it is more than doubtful if this phantom of fleetness and grace has ever been crossed by mortal horseman.

The name zebra is applied, in a promiscuous kind of way, to three striped species of the section *Asinus* of the genus *Equidæ*. These, like the ass, are all distinguished from the true *Equus*, in having a long tail tufted at the end, by callosities on the inner side of the fore legs only, and by uttering a bray instead of a neigh. The three striped *Equidæ*, classified by naturalists, are the quagga (*Equus Quacha*); Burchell's Zebra (*Equus Burchellii*); and the *Equus Zebra*, which is the true zebra. All three are natives of Africa, and are found nowhere else. Both the quagga and Burchell's zebra are inhabitants of the plains, while the true zebra is found only on the mountains.

Yet, though its habitat is so restricted and so distant, the zebra was known to the ancients. It figures far back in history, and was the hippotigris of the Romans. It was very rare, however, even in their

time, and is only once mentioned as present in Imperial Rome in the circus of the Emperor Caracalla. This is the more remarkable because it is believed that the true zebra was once a native of Abyssinia; and the name itself is supposed to be of Abyssinian origin.

The Dutch found it, of course, when they settled at the Cape; and, perhaps, in their early records, there may be mention of the "wilde paard," or "wilde esel," as they indifferently called it.

The Jesuit Tachard seems to have been the first to bring back to Europe, or, at all events, to publish, a full description of the wonderful animal, which he calls *Zembra*. He even gave a woodcut, which proves that he never saw one himself, and took his description either from a skin or from hearsay. The stripings are correctly enough given, but the colours are fabulous and the head impossible.

This was about the middle of the seventeenth century; and twenty or thirty years later another traveller—Ten Rhyn—returned with a more accurate account.

Still later, viz., about 1705 or 1710, Kolben, who spent some years at the Cape, wrote of the zebra as one of the most beautiful, well-shaped, and lively creatures he had ever seen. Yet, he cannot have ever seen one at all to judge by the woodcut he gives, which is almost as uncouth as that of Tachard. His description, however, tallies with the true zebra, not with the quagga:

"His legs are slender and well-proportioned, his hair soft and sleek. There runs along the ridge of his back, from mane to tail, a black list, from which, on each side, proceed streaks of white, blue, and chestnut colour, meeting in circles under his belly. His head and ears, mane and tail, are also adorned with small streaks of the same colours. He is so swift that no horse can keep up with him; and, as he is so hard to be taken, he bears a very great price."

So very great a price, that, according to one historian, the Great Mogul once gave two thousand ducats for a zebra; and, according to another, the Emperor of China presented the Dutch Governor of Batavia, in return for one, with ten thousand taels of silver, and thirty night-gowns, valued in all at one hundred and sixty thousand crowns. But then Emperors—especially of China—are proverbially lavish, and are often made to pay largely in excess of market rates.

Mr. H. A. Bryden, in his book about sport in South Africa, "Kloof and Karoo"—to which we here express our grateful indebtedness for many of the facts for this article—gives a photograph of a mature true zebra, which he saw caught in the Sneeu Berg mountains in 1887. Comparing with this, it seems that the first real portrait of the true zebra was published in Brook's Natural History in 1760. The portrait was taken from a living specimen at Kew, belonging to the then Prince of Wales, but does not tally with the letter-press, which is descriptive of Burchell's zebra.

That caught and photographed in the Sneeu Berg mountains, near Graaf Reinet, in 1887, is believed to be the only mature true zebra ever captured, and, certainly, ever photographed. What is believed to be a new variety of the true zebra was, however, discovered a few years ago in Shoa, in North Africa. A specimen was sent home to President Grévy by the King of Shoa, and was for a short time in the Jardin des Plantes, Paris, where it was photographed. This variety has been named "*Equus Grévyi*," and while differing in a few points from the South African animal, it appears to be really of the same family.

Except for this newly-discovered variety, the true zebra has been found only in the most remote and rugged ranges of Cape Colony—such as the Sneeu Berg, the Witteberg, the Zwartberg, and Winterbock mountains. It never seeks the plains where roam, or used to roam, the zebra of Burchell, and the quagga, or quacha, of the Boers and Hottentots. The quagga has become extinct within the last twenty years, and Burchell's zebra has not been met with south of the Orange River for a very much longer period.

Mr. Bryden, it should be mentioned, made most diligent inquiry after the quagga when he was in South Africa, and he could not find that it has been seen south of the Orange River since about 1860 or 1865. In the Orange Free State it roamed for a few years longer, but is now quite extinct there also. Mr. F. C. Selous, the well-known African traveller, says that he has not heard of a quagga for years, and believes that it is now completely exterminated.

Burchell's zebra, which is often confused by travellers and sportsmen with the true quagga, must still be lingering somewhere in the interior, for skins even yet occa-

sionally find their way to East African ports. There is one variety yet which Mr. Selous says is still "fairly common" in Central Africa. It ranges even north of the equator, while the quagga never seems to have ranged north of the Vaal River.

The following is a pen-and-ink portrait of the now extinct quagga, according to Cornwallis Harris. The adult male stood four feet six inches high at the withers, and measured eight feet six inches in extreme length. Form compact; barrel round; limbs robust, clean, and sinewy; head light and bony, of a bay colour, with longitudinal and narrow transversal stripes, forming linear triangular figures between the eyes and mouth. The muzzle was black; ears and tail strictly equine; crest very high, arched and surmounted by a full standing mane, looking as if it had been hagged, banded alternately brown and white. The colour of the neck and upper parts of the body a dark brown, fading off gradually to white behind and underneath. The upper portions of the body were banded and brindled with dark brown stripes, clearly defined on the neck, but gradually getting fainter until lost behind the shoulder in spots and blotches. The dorsal line was black and broad, widening over the crupper, and the legs were white, with bare spots inside above the knees.

Such was the quagga, whose courage and ferocity in the wild state were renowned, but who was the only one of the zebra family capable of domestication. The Boers in old times often used him about their kraals, and the late Sheriff Parkins used to drive a pair in his phaeton about London. It is to the Boers, however, that we must trace the downfall of the quagga. They began at first to shoot them as food for their slaves, in order to save their own flocks and herds; and afterwards they slaughtered them for their hides, when it was discovered that their skins brought a high price in the hide-market. The plains of the Orange Free State are littered with the bones of countless animals ruthlessly destroyed for their skins alone.

Only two specimens of the quagga were ever in the Zoological Gardens, and both are long since dead. The beautiful creature will soon be lost to memory, as it already is to the Karoos.

Burchell's zebra, which may still be seen in the Zoological Gardens, has, or had, a much wider range than either the quagga

or the true zebra. Although the commonest, it is the most beautiful of the group, being more equine than the other two, and more richly and attractively coloured than the true zebra.

Burchell's zebra was called by the Boers the "bonte quagga" (spotted quagga), which has led to some confusion of the species. Its markings, however, are much fuller than those of the true quagga. Its ears and tail are of the equine type; its body is sienna colour, with brown stripings, and it frequents the plains only.

The true zebra (*Equus Zebra*) is now the only member of the family remaining in Cape Colony; but the troops are becoming fewer and fewer, and the date of its total extermination does not seem far distant. His body is of a beautiful silvery white, with the black markings evenly distributed, and extending to every part except the stomach and the inside of the thighs. The legs are beautifully ribanded in black and white; the head, which is light and clean, is marked in brown, except on the ears, which are again black and white, and on the muzzle, which is a rich bay colour. The ears and tail are, unlike the quagga and Burchell's, distinctly asinine. In height, too, he is smaller than his relatives, averaging only some twelve hands at the shoulder.

In one thing the true zebra has been distinguished above his relations, viz., in his untameable ferocity. There are traditions that the older Boers used to catch them very young and utilise them in harness; but there is a good deal of doubt about these stories, which probably refer to the quagga or Burchell's variety.

There is no doubt about the stories of his ferocity. Pringle gives one of a young Boer who was hunting in the Graaf Reinet mountains, and who forced a zebra to the brink of a precipice. There the courageous animal turned to bay, attacked the huntsman with his teeth, and literally tore his foot from his leg. The injuries were so frightful that the Boer died a few days afterwards.

Sir John Barrow tells of a soldier of Cape Colony, who once tried to ride a captive zebra. It threw him down a steep bank, and then quietly and deliberately bit off one of his ears.

Mr. Bryden tells us that, when at Graaf Reinet two or three years ago, he heard of a small troop of six or eight, which had been seen in a wild and desolate part of the neighbouring mountains. They con-

finied themselves to the almost inaccessible slopes, and had only by chance been sighted by some rhebok hunters.

"I had the greatest curiosity," he says, "to behold these beautiful creatures in their own wild fastnesses, and for many days, while following mountain antelopes, I looked far and wide for the richly-striped 'wilde paard.' At length, one day, when out alone with Igneese, the Kaffir, I caught a glimpse of the herd. I remember the day well. We had sallied out for a day's rhebok shooting on a distant part of the farm, and after a long and unsuccessful tramp over some of the wildest mountains, and through some of the deepest and most lonely kloofs I ever saw in South Africa, we came to an abrupt corner—'hock,' the Boers call it—of a mountain, near to its summit. Stealing quietly round a sort of pass, the Kaffir suddenly whispered, or, rather, gasped, 'Wilde paarden!' and I beheld, right in our front, and rather above us, standing on a rocky platform, a magnificent zebra, and a little beyond him six others. The troop was about two hundred and fifty yards distant, and for two or three minutes we stood, motionless, regarding them. My host strictly preserved, as far as he could, these rare creatures; so, of course, shooting was out of the question, though the light in the Kaffir's eye plainly showed what his feelings were upon the subject of preservation. After a pause, we moved very stealthily forward, to get, if possible, a nearer view. In an instant, the sentinel we had first seen had discovered us, and, at a wild, shrill neigh from him, the whole troop took to their heels, galloped headlong over the mountain top, and were quickly lost to view."

On one other occasion, and one only, Mr. Bryden had another fleeting glimpse of the same troop; but mortal eye will never see them again.

Others are not so forbearing as Mr. Bryden and his host. We have learned the fate of the troop of zebras of Narookas Poort. Tracked by the Boers and the natives—who spare nothing in the shape of game—the noble animals were one by one picked off, until, towards the end of last year, only one stallion remained—the last representative of the striped beauties that for ages have graced these rugged and lonely mountains.

The story of this stallion is an interesting one. Finding himself alone in the world, he joined a troop of horses belonging to the breeding establishment of a farmer,

which were allowed to range far and wide on the hillsides. With these he roamed for some time in good fellowship, and became so accustomed to them that one day he allowed himself to be driven with them into the kraal. There an attempt was made to detain him, in order to domesticate him if possible. He was successfully lassoed and tied to a tree; but then all his ferocious nature was aroused, and no man dared approach his open mouth and gleaming teeth. Still, efforts were made to induce him to feed. When driven into the kraal he was in fine condition, with coat shining in the sun. He refused to eat the grass of the kraal, and all the other food offered to him. Messengers were despatched to the mountain tops to cut for him some of his own natural herbage; but still he resolutely refused to eat. He drank water greedily—three bucketfuls at a time—but would touch nothing else. And so for three weeks he lingered in miserable captivity, on a diet of pure water alone, and then died—the last of his race.

It has been reported that the spoor of a small troop of zebras has been lately seen in one of the remotest parts of the Cape mountains. We hope it is true; and yet what will it avail? The hand of every Boer and every Bushman is against them; and if the true zebra is not yet as completely extinct as his cousin the quagga, or as banished from his ancient haunts as his other cousin, Burchell's zebra, he is trembling on the verge of extermination, and will soon be as lost as the dodo. Alas, the pity of it!

KESTELL OF GREYSTONE.

A SERIAL STORY.

By ESMÈ STUART.

Author of "*Muriel's Marriage*," "*Joan Vellacot*," "*A Faïre Damsell*," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XLII. SYMEE'S RECEPTION.

AMICE was very strong in her determination when once her mind was made up. It was almost impossible to turn her from her plans; and the strange power this gave her was out of all proportion to her gentle appearance. If it could be tabulated, we should find that the chief rulers of the world were quiet, determined people, who, among those who do not know them, pass almost unnoticed.

She acted at once. She knew that not a moment was to be lost if Symee was to be carried off, so, telling her to pack her things, she ordered the pony-carriage, gave a short explanation to Elva, and then she went to the Vicarage to see Herbert Heaton.

Miss Heaton was more than shocked when she heard Amice ask to have a few words alone with the Vicar. Had she been able to prevent it she would have done so; but there was no time. Amice was very shy when she had to talk.

"I want to tell you, Mr. Heaton, that I am going to London with Symee Vicary. Her brother is in trouble, and the time has come when she certainly ought to be with him."

Herbert remembered the former conversation, and felt guilty. He had, indeed, called upon Vicary, but he had not found him at home, and so he had dropped the idea of talking to him, vaguely putting it off till the young man should come back to Rushbrook. Something in Amice's bearing seemed like a silent rebuke.

"Have you got your father's leave, Miss Amice? I thought——"

"No; I am going without. But it is better so. Symee has so little power of making up her mind. It is our fault; she has never had to rough it. Gold seems to do so much harm, oh, so much."

Herbert felt that Amice Kestell was certainly not like other girls. She was a little peculiar, but good; yes, certainly, very good.

"What can I do for you?" he asked, not knowing what she expected of him.

"I want your sanction," she said, slowly, and looking at him very earnestly. "You are a clergyman, you can bind and unloose; it is your gift. I want you to let me go against my father's wish."

Herbert Heaton was a very high-minded man, and believed in his orders more than many of his fellow clergy. Still, to be asked point-blank to use his power in this strange manner, was a case he had never considered.

"You mean that——"

"That my father is angry with me, very angry, about Symee. Still, it is right, and you ought to be able to tell me so."

"But the circumstances; I hardly know—obedience to parents is a distinct commandment, very distinct; in fact——"

Amice lowered her blue eyes from his face. There was no help to be had here.

"Thank you," she said. "I see I must go on my own responsibility. Good-bye, I am in a hurry."

Miss Heaton little guessed the reason of Amice's visit. She was only very indignant that a young lady should dare to ask for a private interview.

"Herbert, you will get yourself into difficulties with that meek-eyed girl. She is very, very bold. Why, Elva, although she has made such a bungle of her affairs, at least never asks for private interviews. What was it about?"

Herbert felt a little ruffled. Women were really made to be a trial to men; especially to young men who only asked to be left alone.

"A matter of no consequence."

"That is just what I thought. A mere excuse for seeing you alone."

"Nonsense," said Herbert, retreating to his study, knowing as he did so that he was running away from a scolding which would have to be delivered in the future; and anticipation always increases the value, either good or bad, of what is expected.

Amice saw that she must rely on herself alone; and, without further waiting, or even allowing Symee to say good-bye to any one but Elva, she drove off to the station.

Poor Symee, in spite of days of unhappiness, she was somewhat like the Israelites. She was fearful of leaving the leeks and the melons of Egypt. What was Jesse's present position? She knew that he was very poor; and then his letters had been so strange that she was afraid.

"Miss Amice, you'll come with me and explain it to Jesse, won't you? He may be angry with me."

"He cannot be angry with you. You have saved some money, Symee, and that will help you both, for a time, at least. And remember, I trust you to write to me for anything you want. There can be no ceremony between us."

"You have always been good to me, Miss Amice."

They did not say much on the way; both had many things to think about.

At last they were approaching Golden Sparrow Street. Jesse was still in that enchanting neighbourhood. He had only moved down lower in the scale of his society, and had a room now in the same house as the inventor, Obed Diggings.

Amice had never been so near to London squalor as when she and Symee stopped at the address Jesse had given.

The cabman stared a little as he put down the box at the poor house, and did not touch his cap when a woman opened the door.

Symee blushed. It seemed too dreadful, bringing Miss Amice here, and yet she relied on her to explain all the circumstances to Jesse.

"Mr. Vicary is at home," said the woman; and she pointed to a back room as she stared at the lady and at Symee's box.

Symee went forward and knocked at the door.

"Come in," said Jesse's voice; and as he looked up he saw a sight which made the blood mount to his cheeks.

"Symee! What have you come here for?" he said, almost savagely.

It was difficult to recognise in him the old kind Jesse Vicary.

"Oh, Jesse——! Miss Amice, please explain. I have been so unhappy."

"I have come up with Symee," said Amice, simply. "She was fretting herself ill about you. You are in trouble; her place is with you. Can she have a room here?"

Amice cast a glance round the place. It sadly wanted a woman's hand. It was untidy and very mean-looking. Squalid was the word best expressing it.

"What have you come here for now?" repeated Jesse, standing up straight, without offering a chair or a hand to his visitors. "I did not ask you to come. You might have come once; now it is too late. This is no fit place for you. Miss Kestell, perhaps you will add to your kindness," he added, with withering scorn in his voice, "by taking my sister back with you, unless indeed——"

He was blinded with a tumultuous throng of passionate thoughts, that surged up like seaweed in a high tide, flung higher than usual on the scorching sand. The beautiful vision of Amice as he had once seen her had lost all its power over him; he saw nothing now but *his* daughter, the child of the man he hated, and of whose downfall he daily thought. Passion had already made terrible havoc in this man; that concentrated meditation on injury had laid a mark as if of bodily disease on Jesse Vicary. His eyes had sunk in their sockets, his cheeks were deadly pale, he seemed already possessed by an evil spirit, that allowed him no rest. No wonder that Symee shrank a little nearer to Miss

Amice. She could hardly recognise her brother.

Amice alone remained composed and unmoved. She looked Jesse straight in the face.

"You are soured by trouble, Mr. Vicary. You do not mean what you say. Symee's duty is with you now. She can come back to us whenever she likes, but at present she will be happier here."

"Happier," laughed Jesse. "Symee long ago declined poverty."

"No, no, Jesse, not that; but I had a duty to Mr. Kestell—to——"

"How dare you mention his name here, Symee? Remember, if you come to me, your past life is over, over for ever."

Amice herself was moved now. She felt her limbs trembling beneath her. Was the curse here, too? She had fancied that she could heal the sore. Instead of experiencing the power of quiet firmness, a strange feeling came over her that she stood before her accuser. How dared she presume to lecture Jesse Vicary, when most likely he was better than herself? But Symee had interposed with the impetuosity which now and then seizes upon timid persons.

"Oh, Jesse, how cruel, how unjust you are! What have you to say against Mr. Kestell? We owe him everything; you have often said so. It is through your own obstinacy that you are here. Mr. Kestell offered you a good position in Canada, and you would not take it."

"And, therefore, he turned me out of the work I could do here. Fine generosity!"

The blood rushed to Amice's face.

"No, no, you cannot believe that, you have no proof," she said. "You have distorted everything because you are suffering."

"I want no proof. I am certain."

Jesse hardly looked at Amice; she felt that he only barely put up with her presence.

The very tone of his voice made Amice certain, too; she saw it all, though she could not reach the clue. For some reason or other, Vicary, this man who had done so much, who had been so exemplary, had incurred her father's displeasure. But what could she do, or what could she say? Nothing.

Jesse moved uneasily; evidently he wanted Amice to go away; and she saw that he did so.

"You will be good to Symee," she

faltering; "she has done for the best. Good-bye, Symee."

Amice wanted to make one more attempt at reconciliation, but she dared not. As silently as she could she took a five-pound note, and slipped it into Symee's hand. But hatred is lynx-eyed. Before Symee could say a word, Jesse had made one step forward, and seized the paper from her.

"Symee, do you not yet understand me? Do you think that if you come here it is to spend their money—their accursed gold? There, if words are not enough, remember actions."

He flung the thin paper into the small grate, where it made a momentary flame. Symee had only time to exclaim, before Amice, trembling and pale, had opened the door and fled. She was brave no longer.

"Their accursed gold, their accursed gold," rang in her ears as she hurried away up Golden Sparrow Street, unheeding the eyes that followed her, or the interest she excited among the neighbours.

"He, too; he, too; he knows it! Only we are ignorant; only we, we his children, who ought to know."

That evening, spent with fatigue and utter misery, Amice Kestell was to have another shock. Elva, her own beautiful sister, the creature whom she loved most, was to be made more unhappy than she was already: she was to marry Walter Akister.

"Amice, don't say a word about it. Papa has begged me to consent. It is for his sake only. If it must be, at least let it never be spoken of between us."

"Oh, Elva, and even I cannot save you!"

CHAPTER XLIII. NEW FRIENDS.

WHEN Amice was gone, Symee felt as if she were alone in a strange and terrible desert land, with no one to help her. She had not moved from the chair into which she had sunk, trembling with fear, when Jesse had snatched the money from her; but with a kind of hopeless despair she cast her eyes round the miserable-looking room. Her natural instinct for tidiness, and of liking pretty things, made her feel that this was indeed sinking down into wretchedness. Oh, what could be the matter with Jesse, the brother who had formerly been so kind and gentle? She was, indeed, punished for having left him to live his life alone for so long. Now he

appeared not to care if she were or were not there.

At last she rose, and, from habit, began putting a few things straight. In a corner was her brother's iron chair-bed, which was now covered with books and papers. The floor, too, was strewn with papers, some of them written over, some with only a few words on them, and then torn across.

"Jesse, dear, where do you get your dinner? Shall I go and see if there is a room I can have? I can pay for it."

The gentle, pathetic tones presently acted as a composing draught on Jesse. It was the sight of Amice that had roused him—Amice and the bank-note.

Though he was mollified, his voice was still strange and hollow, recalling the storm he had passed through.

"Do you know, Symee, that I am a ruined man; that I cannot get work; and that—there, as well out with it—I have already been to the pawn-shop? It is wonderful how soon a man sinks down."

"That is why you are not like yourself, dear Jesse," said Symee, feeling that it was no wonder her brother was like this. "But, now I have come, perhaps luck will turn. You are so clever, people must find it out sooner or later."

"Do you think there are not thousands of clever men in London who yet have to—see their wives starving? Happily I have only myself."

"But, Mr. Fenner. Jesse, have you been to him? I did not tell you because you told me not to mention any of their names; but it is all so sad now. Mr. Fenner never came back to Rushbrook. They say that Miss Kestell gave him up, jilted him; but I know better—he gave her up."

Jesse gazed at his sister, and an eager look passed over his face.

"Ah! was that so? Then that accounts for his being away. I thought perhaps they were married, but—but—Symee, tell me when it was that he went away."

How strange that Jesse, who just now would not hear their names mentioned, now asked after them eagerly! She explained as well as she could the events of the last months.

Jesse stood up and held out his hands to the fire, as if to warm himself. In truth, he did not know what he was doing. It was the idea of revenge that warmed him.

"I am glad, very glad, Symee, about this. The just retribution has begun; but only begun."

"Oh, Jesse, how can you say such dreadful things? What are you talking about retribution? They have all been so unhappy. Mr. Kestell looks ten years older, and he looks ill, too; and Miss Elva, my heart grieves for her. She spends so much time in crying when she thinks no one sees her."

"That is why Mr. Fenner is still away. I have been to look after him, and to get his address, but no one knows it. Listen, Symee; it was through me that that wedding was broken off."

Symee opened her eyes wide in horror. She began seriously to believe that Jesse was mad.

"Through you? Oh, Jesse, what a strange thing to say! You don't mean what you say."

Jesse smiled drearily.

"Yes, through me. That's only the beginning, child—only the beginning."

Symee left the subject. It made her feel so miserable to see Jesse like this. Had want of occupation driven him out of his mind? Then the sooner work of some kind or other was procured, the better. She even made a suggestion.

"Don't you think, dear, instead of hunting for work here in this big, miserable London, it would be better to accept that—that farm? I really wouldn't mind the loneliness. Oh, I would like it."

But Symee repented her rashness.

Jesse almost roughly put his hand on her shoulder.

"Listen, Symee; you are my sister, my only relation, and I love you dearly in spite of the bitter disappointment you made me endure. You have come here by your own accord, or urged to do so by Miss Amice Kestell. I am willing to share my last penny with you, and you may spend your own savings as you like. You earned them honestly, I know that, or I should not say this; but if ever you mention that man's name to me again, or anything connected with him, that moment we part. Don't argue this matter out. You cannot understand my motives, and I don't wish you to do so; but as to the truth of my words, ask yourself if I have ever deceived you. There, now, I will see if you can be lodged in this miserable place. It is the best I can afford; and there are better men than I am lodging under this same roof."

"It's Obed Diggings's lodgings," said Symee, uttering the first words that came into her mind. For Jesse had really frightened her, and she was glad when he went out, so that she might collect her scared senses.

Symee was not brave and hopeful. She did not pretend to herself that she looked forward, even for Jesse's sake, to living in this house; but she could submit patiently, and she did so.

A room was found for her, and the girl soon made the two chambers look, if not homelike, at least tidy. She could cook her meals, and they would not have to go to an eating-house; and, altogether, Jesse felt the benefit of having his sister with him. But there was in him none of the joy about the realisation of his once-cherished hopes. He was grateful to her, and certainly he was more comfortable; but his mind had centred itself on one object, and this, like an evil weed, choked all that came near to it.

Revenge seemed written on everything he looked at. Even when, sick of the thought, he wished to turn away from it, it followed him, and, like a beast of prey once given shelter, it would not be dislodged.

Revenge, revenge!

Yet, though figuratively you can feed on revenge, the daily wants of the natural life must be supplied. Jesse had brooded, had planned, had written out ideas; but also he had been bound to look for work. It was a time when work was difficult to get; to throw yourself or to be thrown out of office work was a very serious event indeed. Almost more serious if the appointment had been of long standing; for, even with the best of recommendations, there would come to the guarded mind of the possible employer, "Why, with this excellent character, should the firm have dismissed him? There must be something behind this." And the shadowy suspicions had more than once shut the doors against Jesse. Every vacant post had a long list of applicants waiting for it; and the struggle for life, now felt for the first time by Jesse, made him more bitter than he was already.

But he had his literary ability, an ability which, to many a hopeful youth, is going to be the "open sesame" of glorious hidden treasures. It is only when it becomes a matter of hunger, of substantial bread, that even the original thinker begins to find out that if the struggle in getting employment by writing figures and business letters is

great, there is but little difference when it is a case of coining gold out of brains—not easy-going, calm, contented brains, but fever-haunted, evil-haunted, demon-possessed brains.

The editor who had taken Hoel Fenner's place knew nothing personally of Vicary; but, by hearsay, he was a man who had been ill-judged enough to refuse a good position. The refusal of an article which Jesse sent was courteous but decided; evidently the paper in question had not been read, and, in his present mood, Jesse took that as another insult. He tried where he was not known, and the results, as usual, were slow, and by no means always sure.

He had come to a low ebb when Symee appeared, and he was conscious of feeling angry, because he could no longer receive her as he had once hoped. The benefit came from her, and this annoyed him and aggravated the evil passion which, like a long pent-in volcano, seemed to envelope the whole fair country of his character in ruin.

Few things take such an effect upon us as to see what had once been green grass, studded with flowers, obliterated by several inches of hot ashes. It is difficult, almost impossible, at the time to remember that in some cases this same blotting out may act as manure on the natural soil. In every soul there has been, or will be, a "divine moment;" but in every soul, too, there has been, or will be, the shadow of its lower nature visible to itself. Only, the presence of the shadow demonstrates the presence of light. It was because of Jesse Vicary's past strivings after pure sunshine that he was now so painfully conscious of the cold shadow; he fancied that the light was absorbed; he fancied, even, that he had never had it; he seemed hardly to care whether or not he ever had. To himself, and to others, Jesse Vicary was a changed man. This strange metamorphosis, this wild, passionate impatience, which burst forth on the least provocation, was a new revelation to poor Symee; she took refuge with Obed Diggings's daughter.

On the plea of incessant work, or, rather, of seeking for it, Vicary had absented himself from all his neighbours. The poor, enthusiastic inventor had been decidedly repressed by his old friend; he could not understand it, but he was not discouraged, and the advent of Symee re-awakened his dreams. Here, at all events, was some one who had heard as yet nothing of the wonders of the new bouquet-

holding frame which, somehow or other, was still in a rudimentary stage, and was not yet bought up by thousands in Oxford Street. But the faith that saw these splendid visions was not one which shrank or changed easily; on the contrary, the delay was only in order that the success might be greater.

Golden Sparrow Street was not exactly reticent about affairs of its neighbours, and Symee's arrival was chronicled with that wealth of detail which belongs to the class which inhabits such neighbourhoods; at all events, in Mrs. Dunn's lodgings, the new arrival interested Obed's sick girl, and gave her fresh food for meditation.

"Father, just ask her to step in, do now," said Milly.

Milly always got her way, so Diggings one evening obeyed.

"Well, Miss Vicary, if I may make so bold, being as it were a friend and a countryman—Greystone was my dwelling-place, miss, and seeing, also, your brother has been always a good friend to us—if you will step down and visit my afflicted child I shall take it as a mark of favour."

"Jesse said he was going out this evening. I will come down with pleasure."

And so Symee, instead of coiling Miss Kestell's dark hair round her head, found herself sitting by Milly Diggings's couch; whilst the great inventor, casting a strong odour of tobacco around him, poured forth his hopes as he cooled his throat with a pint of beer.

"It was a bad day, Miss Vicary, when your brother lost his situation; it's his first mortal trial, and he takes it a bit hard. But he shouldn't do so, he really shouldn't. What's an office-stool compared to the genius of inventing? You shall see my last superb idea. Milly is delighted with it; but we must not take her opinion, as, naturally, she's prejudiced, Miss Symee; a daughter's praise is hardly worth the use of the letters of the alphabet as composes the words. But every mortal eye that has beheld it says, 'Obed Diggings, there's no sign of failure here. Work on and perfect it.' And I do. It is nearing perfection. The brass wire that attaches the glass tube, Miss Symee, it's a marvel of ingenuity, though I say it as shouldn't. But you, too, will say it is; every one does."

The deep-set eyes glowed with a living fire, which compelled Symee to agree with the speaker. This living faith was too powerful for the girl's weaker nature.

"I'm sure it will succeed, Mr. Diggings."

"It will, Miss Symee, it will; and because I think your brother is a fine young man, with a future before him, yes, it is for that that I have offered to associate him with my scheme. He doesn't accept because he's generous. He wants me to have all the credit and all the profit. Well, I say, Jesse Vicary is a noble soul, and I recognise it."

"Jesse is good," faltered Symee, feeling at once kindly towards the old man. "I wish he would not take this trouble so much to heart. I've got a little money saved, and, before that is finished, something will turn up. I know it will. I can't understand. It isn't like Jesse to take things hard."

"He wants the divine spark of the inventor," said Obed, striking his hand on the table and taking a long pull at his tankard. "Good as he is, I fear he hasn't got that. Miss Symee, believe me, it makes up for many ills. When my poor wife had been lying for twelve hours in a state of coma, what was it that kept me up? It was the divine spark of the inventor. I said, 'I can't raise her up, maybe—God alone can do that—but I can raise up something else from here.'" He tapped his rugged forehead. "'I, too, can create.' Believe me, miss, it was a mighty consolation."

"It must have been," said Symee, humbly. "Perhaps not just at the time, but afterwards. I never invented anything, so I don't know the feeling."

"No, nor poor Milly. She took after my wife. It's not given to women, Miss Symee, to be inventors. It's man as has got that. Women, they pick up bits, and glue this and that together, and feel mighty clever over their mendings; but it's our makings that makes us happy and different from the womenkind."

"But they, I mean your inventions, have never brought you much—money?" asked Symee, knowing that, in his prosperity, Jesse had often helped the inventor.

"Money! What is money? No, not money, but fame is what oils the heart, Miss Symee. That chariot will be in a triumphant procession on which—" Here Mr. Diggings a little lost the power of guiding his chariot, and left it, hiding the retreat by coughing. "Miss Symee, money is the reward of the poor imitator, of the man who steals ideas—steals my ideas. He gets money; money that burns his

pocket, like pure rum that scorches the throat. That's where money goes to; but do you think it will always be so? No, no, no! Justice comes with a leaden foot; but at last, yes, at last, she strikes with an iron heel."

"Doesn't father talk beautifully?" said Milly; "and he really has nearly finished his frame. Sometimes he doesn't always finish his inventions. But this one—oh, father, wait till it's really finished before you show it to Miss Symee."

"You and Jesse must come to a feast, when that day comes; eh, Milly? And you'll go, my beauty, into the country; you shall go to Greystone, where you used to pick daisies and buttercups. And you'll have the doctor that visits Queen Victoria, our Gracious Majesty herself—that you shall, and he'll cure you. Doctors don't look where the gold comes from, Miss Symee, so that they can see it's of the right colour. But I forgive them, for they belong to the great class of inventors."

"Do they?" asked Symee. "Mr. Kestell said so often that Mr. Pink couldn't originate anything new; he always said the same thing about wanting sleep and tone."

"No, Miss Symee. Every few years, as I can see in the papers, there's new names given to the same old diseases; and, upon my word, the doctors are very clever at making of them up. Yes, the diseases are the same, depend upon it; it's only that the doctors turns and twists the names about, so as to make us fancy we have got something strange which they can cure. Kestell of Greystone must be an old man now. I remember him when I was a lad; spruce and spry he was, but not a rich man at all. It was all along of Westacre lands, poor Button used to say, that Mr. Kestell got rich. That's how he got the gold; but it was a chance such as doesn't come in the way of inventors. We have to get gold by the sweat of our

brows, as Adam got his posies and his corn, maybe. We think nothing of luck. It's Thought as triumphs in the long run, not a lucky buying up of land."

"Did he buy it of Button?" asked Symee, whose heart was at Rushbrook, and who cared more for a word about Mr. Kestell than all Diggings's inventions put together.

"No, not that. Poor Button's often showed me and Milly the deeds. It was a young gentleman that wanted to invest four hundred pounds that bought it. If he had lived, there would have been a piece of luck for him he wouldn't have expected. The earth hides up a mighty lot of money, Miss Symee, locks it up till the right time comes, and then she seems to run it up in the market till she finds the highest bidder. She's 'cute, albeit she's so silent; eh, Milly?"

There was no chance of Milly getting many words in when the inventor was in a mood for speech; but she was too interested in Button's deeds to allow her father all the conversation.

"Poor Button, father, he's dead and buried. I wonder if they buried the old deeds with him. He said that I was to have them when he died; for I liked spelling over the odd words. 'This indenture witnesseth,' was on one of his bits of paper. If you write to your ladies, Miss Symee, I wish you'd ask them whether the papers are still at the public. Look here, here's Button's own will, I made him write, 'I leave to Milly Diggings my title-deeds, as are merely copies and of no use to any one;' and look, here's his signature; but father didn't take the trouble to write about them, they was worthless, you know."

"I'll tell Miss Amice, she's always so kind that she'll make enquiries," said Symee, kindly.

So ended the evening; but Symee felt less lonely, and a tiny sense of freedom crept into her heart.

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